

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6743
INFO AMEMBASSY KINSHASA PRIORITY
USNMR SHAPE PRIORITY
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER PRIORITY
USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY LONDON
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ALSO FOR USEEC

E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PEPR, MPOL, BE, CG, FR
SUBJECT: SHABA DEBATED IN BELGIAN PARLIAMENT, MAY 23,
1978

SUMMARY. BELGIAN POLICY IN THE SHABA CRISIS WAS THE
SUBJECT OF A LONG, HEATED DEBATE LEADING TO A VOTE
OF CONFIDENCE IN THE LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT
MAY 23. THE GOVERNMENT SPOKESMEN ANSWERED OPPOSITION
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CRITICISMS AND THE GOVERNMENT WON THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE
WITH NO DEFECTIONS FROM THE COALITION MAJORITY. END
SUMMARY.

1. THE DEBATE IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES LASTED FROM
2 P.M. TO 11 P.M. AND WAS OFTEN ACRIMONIOUS AND HEATED.
THE BULK OF THE ATTACKS AND QUESTIONS ON GOVERNMENT

POLICY CAME FROM THE MAJOR OPPOSITION PARTY, THE MODERATELY CONSERVATIVE LIBERALS. PRO-FRENCH VIEWS FROM VARIOUS ELEMENTS OF THE BELGIAN POLITICAL SPECTRUM WERE VOICED AS A MEANS OF CRITICIZING GOVERNMENT POLICY. THE POLITICALLY INSIGNIFICANT COMMUNIST PARTY (2 MEMBERS) SAID THAT THE BCP COULD HAVE VOTED FOR THE GOVERNMENT IN THE VOTE OF CONFIDENCE HAD THE WORDING OF THE RESOLUTION BEEN LIMITED TO THE BELGIAN INTERVENTION RATHER THAN A MORE GENERAL FORMULATION ON GOVERNMENT POLICY.

2. THE DEBATE FOCUSED ON THREE GENERAL TOPICS:

(A) THE CONDUCT OF THE BELGIAN INTERVENTION; (B) ALLEGATIONS OF FRANCO-BELGIAN DIFFERENCES; AND (C) FUTURE BELGIAN-ZAIRIAN RELATIONS.

3. THE CONDUCT OF THE BELGIAN INTERVENTION. THE

LIBERALS QUESTIONED THE REASONS FOR THE DELAY IN THE BELGIAN INTERVENTION, COMPARING THAT DELAY UNFAVORABLY WITH THE MORE RAPID FRENCH MOVE. PRIME MINISTER TINDEMANS AND FOREIGN MINISTER SIMONET IN ANSWER REVIEWED THE LOGISTICAL AND DIPLOMATIC PREPARATION REQUIRED FOR THE OPERATION. THEY NOTED THE NEED TO COORDINATE WITH SEVERAL ELEMENTS OF THE USG AS BELGIUM DID NOT HAVE ALL THE LOGISTIC SUPPORT AVAILABLE FOR THE OPERATION. FURTHER, THEY NOTED THAT DIPLOMATIC CONTACTS HAD TO BE ESTABLISHED WITH THE GOVERNMENT OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FRANCE, ZAIRE, ANGOLA AND ZAMBIA, AS WELL AS WITH THE RED CROSS, UN AND OAU. THE LIBERALS ALSO CRITICIZED THE GOVERNMENT FOR THE PRIOR PUBLICITY GIVEN TO THE BELGIAN INTERVENTION. TINDEMANS AND SIMONET NOTED IN REPLY THAT THE WHOLE ISSUE HAD RECEIVED MUCH PUBLICITY, INCLUDING THE ZAIRIAN REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE AND THE FRENCH ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTENTIONS. TINDEMANS DID ADMIT THAT SOME LEAKS TO THE PRESS FROM CRISIS CABINET MEETINGS HAD OCCURRED AND THAT HE WOULD SEE TO IT THAT THE NECESSARY ACTION WAS TAKEN AGAINST THOSE WHO SPOKE OUT OF TURN. MINISTER OF DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS SAID THAT IT WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE TO USE OTHER MILITARY BASES THAN THE MILITARY SIDE OF BRUSSELS AIRPORT FOR THE DEPARTURE OF THE BELGIAN FORCES AS CIVILIAN (SABENA) AIRCRAFT HAD TO BE USED AND THESE REQUIRED REGULAR CIVIL AIR OVERFLIGHT CLEARANCES AND PROCESSING.

4. ALLEGATIONS OF FRANCO-BELGIAN DIFFERENCES. BOTH TINDEMANS AND SIMONET DENIED FLATLY THAT FRANCO-BELGIAN DIFFERENCES HAD TAKEN PLACE TO THE DETRIMENT OF THE OPERATION. THEY NOTED THAT FRENCH GOALS IN SHABA

WERE DIFFERENT FROM THOSE OF THE GOB, WHICH WERE LIMITED TO HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE. COOLS, ONE OF THE CO-PRESIDENTS OF THE SOCIALIST PARTY (WHICH IS IN THE PRESENT GOVERNING COALITION), SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF HIS PARTY, TOOK A STRONGLY NEGATIVE VIEW OF FRENCH POLICY IN ZAIRE AS A FORM OF NEO-COLONIALISM, NOTING FURTHER THAT FRANCE MAINTAINED 9,000 SOLDIERS IN AFRICA FOR ITS OWN POLICY PURPOSES. SIMONET REVIEWED BELGIAN-FRENCH CONTACTS WHICH LED UP TO THE SEPARATE INTERVENTIONS. HE SAID THAT HE HAD ORIGINALLY BEEN

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IN TOUCH WITH THE FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER AND THAT THEY HAD AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO A JOINT INTERVENTION. HOWEVER, THE FRENCH HAD THE CAPACITY TO MOVE FASTER THAN THE BELGIANS AND QUICKLY MOVED FORCES TO ZAIRE FROM CORSICA. A ZAIRIAN GENERAL AND A FRENCH COLONEL IN ZAIRE HAD THEN DECIDED TO CONDUCT A PARACHUTE OPERATION. SIMONET SAID THAT HE WAS INFORMED OF THIS DECISION

BY THE BELGIAN AMBASSADOR IN ZAIRE AND THE INFORMATION WAS SUBSEQUENTLY CONFIRMED TO HIM AFTER HE GOT IN TOUCH WITH THE FRENCH FOREIGN MINISTER. SIMONET SAID THAT HE HAD ASKED FOR ADDITIONAL TIME TO PREPARE AND CONSULT, LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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BUT THAT THE PRESIDENT OF FRANCE HAD INFORMED THE GOB OF FRANCE'S INTENTION TO GO IN ALONE DUE TO THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND AT KOLWEZI.

5. FUTURE BELGIAN-ZAIRIAN RELATIONS. SIMONET SAID THAT THE GOB WOULD CONTINUE TO MEET ITS COMMITMENTS TO ZAIRE, THOUGH HE SAID HE WAS AWARE THAT BELGIAN-ZAIRIAN RELATIONS WOULD PASS THROUGH A PERIOD OF TENSION. SIMONET CONCLUDED THAT NO EFFECTIVE ANSWER HAD YET BEEN FOUND TO THE PROBLEM OF PROTECTION FOR BELGIANS WORKING IN TROUBLED AREAS OF ZAIRE.

6. THE QUESTION OF AN INTERNATIONAL PEACEKEEPING FORCE FOR ZAIRE CAME UP BOTH IN PARLIAMENT AND IN A SIMONET PRESS CONFERENCE THE EVENING OF MAY 23. TINDEMANS SAID IN PARLIAMENT THAT IT WAS NECESSARY TO FIND A "EURAFRICAN FORMULA" TO ASSURE THE SECURITY OF BELGIAN TECHNICIANS SENT TO WORK IN ZAIRE. SUCH A FORMULA MIGHT BE WORKED OUT BY "AFRICAN STATES" WITH LOGISTIC SUPPORT FROM THE EC NINE. SIMONET HAS BEEN TASKED WITH EXPLORING THIS MATTER WITH BELGIUM'S EC PARTNERS. SIMONET DENIED THAT A EUROPEAN PEACEKEEPING FORCE WAS UNDER CONSIDERATION. HE SAID THAT BELGIUM WOULD IN THE NEAR FUTURE CONTACT ITS EUROPEAN PARTNERS TO DISCUSS THE EVENTS IN SHABA WITH THEM. HE COMMENTED THAT A UN OR OAU PEACEKEEPING FORCE IN ZAIRE APPEARED UNLIKELY AND SAID THAT HE PLANNED TO HAVE DISCUSSIONS ON JUNE 13-14 WITH HIS ZAIRIAN COUNTERPART.

7. COMMENT: DESPITE THE GRUMBLING AND PASSION IN PARLIAMENT, IT IS APPARENT THAT THE GOB HAS SOLID POPULAR SUPPORT FOR ITS LIMITED OPERATION IN SHABA. INTER-PARTY DIFFERENCES IN THE GOVERNING COALITION WERE COMPLETELY SUBMERGED IN FACE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CIVILIAN LOSSES IN SHABA. THE BULK OF THE CRITICISM OF THE GOB CAME FROM THE RIGHT FOR NOT DOING ENOUGH IN TIME. ANTI-GOVERNMENT DEMONSTRATIONS ORGANIZED BY THE BELGIAN LEFTIST AND ZAIRIAN EXILE "ZAIRE COMMITTEE" THAT HAVE TAKEN PLACE HAVE BEEN PEACEFUL AND LIMITED

IN NUMBERS OF PARTICIPANTS. DE TARR

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